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# 'Extremely Pleased,' Kennedy Says of Deal

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Staff Reporter

PALM BEACH, Fla., Dec. 24—President Kennedy tonight said he was "extremely pleased" that the Cuban prisoners had been released.

In a statement issued here, the President said it was "in the interest of our national principles" that these men had been saved "from a slow death."

Mr. Kennedy praised the American food and drug manufacturers, transportation companies and labor unions that cooperated in providing the goods shipped to Cuba as ransom for the 1113 prisoners of the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion 20 months ago.

"This Christmas will be a little brighter for all Americans because these men are being united with their loved ones," the President said.

It obviously also will be brighter for the President, who approved the attack and took full responsibility for its failure.

He and his brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, have worked behind the scenes for months to bring about the prisoners' release from the Castro jails.

There was no information here regarding the possibility of obtaining the release of 23 United States citizens held in Cuban jails. But there obviously was hope that release of the Cuban prisoners might

pave the way to freedom for the Americans.

White House Press Secretary Pierre Salinger declined to comment when asked whether release of the Cubans might lead to other negotiations with the Castro government or even improved Cuban-American relations.

Salinger refused to speculate as to what Premier Fidel Castro might hope to gain by the agreement or whether he might be heading for a somewhat altered course in his relations with other hemisphere countries.

Officials here acknowledged that there may be widespread debate on the wisdom of paying Castro a ransom for the Bay of Pigs prisoners.

But it was made clear that the President felt the Government had a moral obligation to the prisoners and believed that if their release were not obtained in the near future they might die in prison.

Ever since their capture in April, 1961, the President has been severely criticized for sanctioning the attack as he did. Many Cuban exiles were

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utter because the President The American Red Cross has

did not provide greater American support for the operation.

For these reasons, plus the knowledge that Castro might use the men as hostages, the fate of the prisoners has weighed heavily on the President. He has been willing to go to extreme lengths to obtain their freedom.

The text of the President's statement:

"I am extremely pleased that the negotiations undertaken by Mr. (James B.) Donovan on behalf of the Cuban Families Committee, whose advisory committee is headed by Gen Lucius Clay, have resulted in the release of these Cuban prisoners. I know the American people are proud to welcome these brave men who have endured so much in the cause of freedom to our shores.

"The return of these men could not have been possible without the dedication of the Cuban Families Committee and its attorney, Mr. Donovan, and the magnificent way in which manufacturers of foods, drugs and other products throughout the United States, transportation companies and labor unions, have come to the Committee's assistance.

again performed a notable service in the cause of humanitarianism in arranging for the shipment of the goods.

"I believe that bringing about the freedom of these prisoners and saving them from a slow death is in the interest of our national principles. This Christmas will be a little brighter for all Americans because these men are being united with their loved ones. Americans have always had a strong bond of friendship for freedom fighters throughout the world. They have a particularly strong bond of friendship for these dedicated Cubans who fought so valiantly for the freedom of their homeland."